

# **Neesima Shimeta**

P.M.  
JAPAN

**A HERO**

“Live more with Christ, catch more of His Spirit : for the Spirit of Christ is the Spirit of Missions, and the nearer we get to Him, the more intensely missionary we shall become.”



This map is from the  
Foreign Missions Library  
of Presbyterian Board.

## NEESIMA SHIMETA. A HERO.

---

BY V. F. P.

---

Neesima Shimeta or Joseph Hardy Neesima as he became known, proved himself indeed a hero. He was the first native ordained evangelist of Japan. But we will let him intro-

I understood God at first. \* \* \* I understood that Jesus Christ was Son of Holy Ghost, and He was crossed for the sins of all the world; therefore we must call Him our Saviour."

He began to read English. One day he suddenly heard the prince's schooner was about to sail for Hakodate. Neesina said: "I got warm heart to go thither." Gathering together a few necessaries, with the prince's permission he started on the month's voyage, "casting myself into the providence of God," for he wanted to leave his land altogether, and at Hakodate he took ship for Shanghai secretly as it was death to leave the country without a government permit.

"I am no more my parents' but my God's," he thought when resolving to leave home for a time. And his God took care of him.

On the Wild Rover, the ship that in 1865 bore him to America, the captain called him Joe, hence his "American parents," Mr. and Mrs. Alpheus Hardy of Boston, called him Joseph Hardy Neesima. Mr. Hardy was the ship's owner and befriended the brave, determined lad as soon as he landed.

Finding Mr. Hardy was going to send him to school, Neesima wrote him his thanks, adding, "Let me be civilized with Bible." His years at Amherst and Andover

gained him many friends, for he was full of fun, even making jokes in English. But one and all felt most his consuming love for Christ and his absorption in the Bible. "He evidently does all that God may be honored," wrote one who was describing his uncommon abilities and progress. In his first year in America he led an old lady to Christ.

Letters from his father in Japan wishing his return made him write to Mr. Hardy: "How can I go back now, having a plow on my hands? I must prepare myself for my Master's work."

While at Andover he received a Japanese Government

permit to continue his Christian studies in the United States. Later he was invited to Washington, in 1872, to meet the Japanese Embassy, the most important embassy that ever left Japan.

He was asked to assist Mr. Tanaka, the Commissioner of Education, and after his Christian studies had been explained and permitted, for three months he visited schools and colleges in the Eastern States, writing to Mr. Hardy that Mr. Tanaka was "almost awe-struck with the schools, churches and some charitable institutions supported by the Christian people or societies."

When a tour among European institutions with Mr.

Tanaka, was projected, Neesimma went "because I may possibly do some service for the promotion of Christ's Kingdom in his heart, hence to Japan. I will simply say 'Thy will be done.'"

In London he "made the loudest Macedonian cry" for Japan. Everywhere he was loyal to Christ, persuading many to study the Bible, keeping holy the Sabbath despite his Japanese companions.

Returning to America, a few months later, May 1874, he was ordained and preached his first sermon from the text he always loved best, John 3:16.

In the fall he started for Japan, having refused all



Government positions, his one desire to preach Christ. He made a plea for Christian education in Japan before the American Board ere he started, and before he was through speaking, five thousand dollars were subscribed for a Christian college. Then, after nearly ten years absence, he started for San Francisco, finding in his journey West opportunities for speaking for Christ, on the train, among the Chinese in the Western town where he spent Sunday.

Back in Japan, he hurried to his aged father and soon had the joy of burning all the "paper, wooden, earthen and brass gods in the house." Priests and people flocked

to listen to the new preaching. Thirty men in his town took up a collection for purchasing Christian books for themselves. "I find here everything ready for the gospel," he wrote to Mr. Hardy. Neesima was the first to carry the gospel to the interior. His bold utterances roused the governor who visited Tōkyō to consult the authorities, but his connection with the Iwakura Embassy had made him well known, and he was left free to begin a movement leading to one of the most thoroughly Christian communities in Japan.

Kyōto, that most exclusive place, was finally settled on for his college, and after all the difficulties of local au-

thorities and central government were removed and permission obtained for a missionary to teach and live in the city—a Hundred Days' Exhibition having prepared the way—Neesima began his great work, opening the Doshisha (One purpose or one Endeavor Company), with eight pupils, November 29th, 1875.

The Bible was not permitted at first and Christianity had to be taught as Moral Science.

In those first few months he nearly broke down,—the thought of those "millions of his people passing into eternity without a knowledge of Christ" almost made him crazy.

Criticism, opposition from his countrymen and the

missionaries were hard to bear. "Oh," he exclaimed, "that I could be crucified once for Christ and be done with it."

Beside his school duties he was kept so busy in organizing the native missionary work, corresponding and journeying much for this end, that for years he had neither rest nor vacation.

"I am fully convinced the Lord has designed me to bear all sorts of trials for extending His Kingdom in my beloved country," he wrote the Board, and later on to his beloved friend Mr. Hardy, "I feel more and more my life is not for me. Whether I live or die I must live or die for Christ."

Failing health occasioned a visit to America by way of Ceylon and Europe. In 1885, while seeking health and rest up in Maine, he found no Sunday School in his village summer home and started one at once, ever after writing from Japan until his death: "How is my Sunday School getting along?"

December saw him back in his native land at work, hard work for Christ and his countrymen. He had the joy of seeing his Doshisha grow, receive endowments, yet felt he had "been able to do so little owing to my feeble health."

To his wife he said near the last that he wanted no

monument. "It is sufficient to have a wooden post standing on it 'The grave of Joseph Neesima.'" January 23rd, 1889, with the words "Peace, Joy, Heaven," on his lips, he entered into rest.

A large tent was erected in the college grounds for the chapel could not hold the four thousand people that assembled at his funeral, "graduates from all parts of the empire, the provincial and city authorities, and representatives of the foreign missions." "The procession a mile and a half in length, was formed in the heavy rain, the students again acting as bearers. They had from the first insisted upon doing everything possible with their own

hands, and had themselves prepared the grave." He could not be buried by his father in the Buddhist grounds for he was "the very head of Christianity in Japan," yet priests bore a banner in the procession with the inscription "From the Buddhists of Osaka." A banner from Tōkyō had his last utterance: "Free education, self-governing churches; these keeping equal step, will bring this nation to honor."

A Japanese friend called Neesima "The pole star of our religion."

A few of his words to the same friend may stimulate us also as they are about "the Christians of to-day. Being

fed and clothed by God they are just like dead matter. This is because they do not understand the words of God. Among many sad things this is the most deplorable. Even if 39,000,000 of people became nomially Christians, this will not suffice to purify society. This should not be lightly thought of."

May these words pierce us through also, that we may abide in Him, as did Neesima, and we also will bring forth "much fruit; for without Me ye can do nothing.

"If ye abide in Me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you."



PRINTED BY MARY ASHTON,  
13 N. WARREN STREET,  
TRENTON, N. J.

